

VZCZCXRO3993
RR RUEHLH RUEHPW
DE RUEHKP #0151/01 1210248
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 010248Z MAY 09
FM AMCONSUL KARACHI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1056
INFO RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 0514
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0323
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 0281
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1871
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE 2730
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR 4613
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL
RHMFISS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEHPH/CDC ATLANTA GA
RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KARACHI 000151

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAGR](#) [TBIO](#) [SOCI](#) [EAID](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: KARACHI - AIRLINES ALERTED TO CHECK FOR H1N1 AT KARACHI
JINNAH INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Summary

1. (SBU) While there are currently no reported cases of H1N1 "swine flu" in Pakistan, the government is beginning preparations in case the virus arrives via international travelers. The Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has increased monitoring of inbound passengers to check for those with exposure to or showing symptoms of the deadly virus. Health experts warn, however, that if the virus reaches Pakistan, the country is ill prepared to identify the virus and treat infected patients. End Summary.

Monitoring at Karachi Airport

2. (SBU) Karachi Jinnah International Airport, Pakistan's busiest airport, receives 25 international flights per day, mainly from the transit hubs of Bangkok, Dubai, and Qatar. The CAA announced that all inbound international passengers will be monitored for symptoms of H1N1, particularly those arriving from infected destinations and the transit hubs. The Authority further instructed airline crews to be vigilant, and to report passengers exhibiting symptoms, such as incessant coughing and fever, to airport officials. The CAA, in conjunction with the Director General of Health, is making arrangements to meet any arriving passenger suspected of carrying the virus. News reports, however, quote CAA officials as saying nothing is being done, and passengers who did not notice any screening. (Note: The Director General of Health was quoted in the press as saying Pakistan was at low risk because the disease is spread mostly from pigs and there are no pig farms in the country. End Note.) Health experts also warned of the need to contain the virus to the airport, due to the lack of adequate treatment facilities in Karachi.

3. (SBU) Airport Manager Ashfaq Ahmad confirmed that airports in Pakistan have made emergency arrangements to monitor the H1N1, and that the Ministry of Health is making arrangements in the eventuality of the disease arriving at an airport. Sindh Health Department Secretary Mohamad Hussain Syed told Post the provincial department is working with the federal Ministry of Health in devising a strategy for a possible outbreak. The provincial ministry has set up an isolation ward at Karachi Civil Hospital, and, if needed, will create two more at Liaquat Medical Hospital and Dr. Ziauddin Hospital. However, Mr. Syed raised concerns, especially regarding ability to test for and identify the virus, and also how to treat patients.

Health Experts Express Concern

14. (SBU) Mr. Syed said that he fears that if the virus arrives in Karachi, it will spread quickly on the streets, and turn into an outbreak. Unfortunately, he continued, Pakistan lacks basic facilities to distinguish between normal flu and H1N1. Other health officials expressed similar fears. Dr. Afia Zafar, a member of Infection Control Committee at Aga Khan Hospital, said the health infrastructure is not sufficient to deal with any eventuality arising from the spread of the virus. The ability to collect, transport, and test samples is non-existent. Many government health facilities lack not just isolation wards, but also preventative equipment such as gloves and masks. Dr. Shahana UrooJ Kazmi, Dean Faculty of Microbiology at the University of Karachi, said that preparedness is almost zero. She expressed an urgent need for H1N1 antigen, antibody vaccine, N95 Masks and lab equipment for testing. She fears that if the virus reaches the Middle East or India, it will likely come to Pakistan.

Comment

15. (SBU) If H1N1 migrates to Pakistan, it will likely arrive in Karachi first. Government officials are taking action to identify passengers with the virus and prevent its spread into the general population. However, Pakistan health facilities are lacking, and public health experts are in short supply. If the virus arrives, it may be difficult to treat and control without foreign assistance. That being said, the GOP can use similar surveillance and tripwires that it has developed for H5N1 avian influenza. The GOP is much better prepared for this type of outbreak than it was several years

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ago before avian influenza spread to Pakistan.
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